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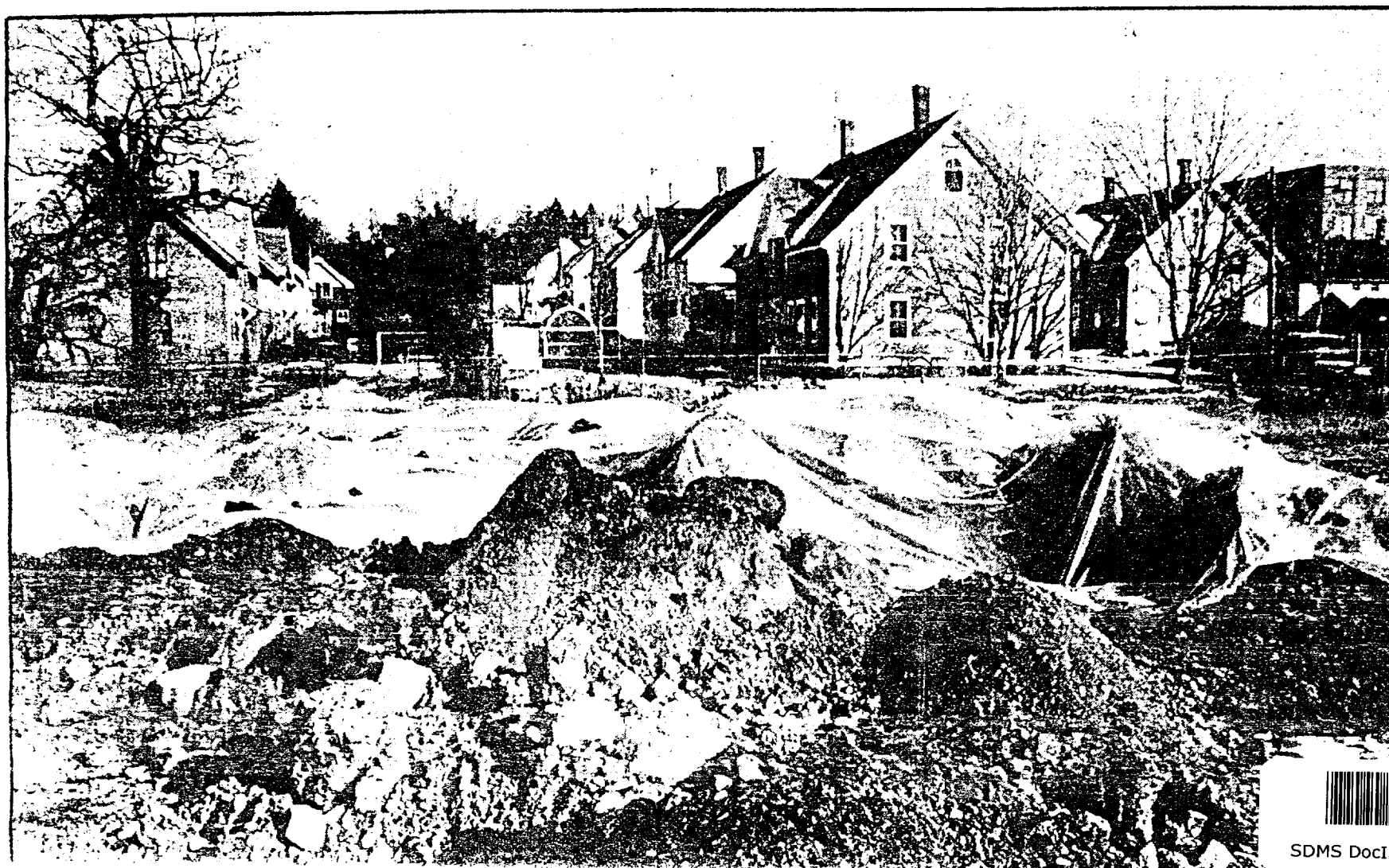
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# Oil seepage clean up nearly complete

By RICK BAKER  
Tribune Staff Writer

WHITINSVILLE --- The clean up of an underground oil seepage between the foundry and the powerhouse at the former Whitin Machine Works is nearly completed and soil samples were sent to a Rhode Island laboratory on Monday.

The land is now owned by The Shop at Whitinsville but the clean up is being paid for by White Consolidated Industries, the former owner of the land. Boston developer Sidney Covich bought the mill complex last year from WCI. However, the sale agreement contained a clause which stipulated that WCI would be responsible for any environmental problems that would turn up.

The oil was discovered last summer by WCI officials when they found traces of oil leaking into the Mumford River. The company informed the Department of Environmental Quality Engineering (DEQE) and the river problem was cleaned up according to Dan Marques, an environmental engineer with WCI.

After the clean up was completed, WCI hired an outside testing team to run a check on the property and discovered the oil deposits outside the foundry, Marques said.

Bids were sent out for the cleanup operation and New England Pollution Control Company of Norwalk, Conn. was hired to complete the project.

NEPCCO started digging between the foundry and the powerhouse about two weeks ago. Marques said when the job is completed, a trench 200 feet long, 16 feet deep and 12 feet wide will have been dug. A 20 mil plastic liner will be placed at the bottom of the trench and the hole will be refilled with clean gravel and stone. Near the center of the trench a decompression pump will be sunk 21 feet into the ground

Marques said. The pump will then separate the oil from the water and pump the oil above ground where it will be stored in metal tanks. Marques said the system will be monitored weekly by NEPCCO.

According to Marques, the oil seeped into the ground from large dumpsters that once contained oil coated scrap metal. "There's no way of telling how long the oil has been seeping into the ground. It could have been 50 years or it could have been 100," he said.

The oil-dirt has been removed with a back hoe and trucked to an open field behind the plant. "We moved it there because that was the farthest point away from the river," Marques said.

The digging is expected to be completed

sometime this week and then said Marques the only thing left to do is to wait for the lab samples to return.

Then the DEQE will analyze the findings and inform WCI where the soil can be dumped said Gerry Cushing, a senior engineer with the DEQE. Cushing has been present at the work site throughout the digging. "The DEQE is here to make sure they (WCI) are following the law in regards to the clean up. We want to make sure the oil doesn't seep back into the river," Cushing said.

The dirt piles behind The Shop have caused concern from the residents in the Oak and West Street lower areas.

Marques said, "There is nothing but oil in the dirt. We tested the stuff already. We

wouldn't let our people handle anything that might be hazardous. And the people from NEPCCO wouldn't let their workers near the stuff either."

A representative of NEPCCO said the material was not hazardous. He said if it was the workers would have been wearing protective suits during the cleanup operation and they were not.

Marques said he understood the problems the smell was causing the residents, but added, "the reason we waited until winter to do this was so it would be less of a nuisance to them. If we did it in the summer when their windows were open, it would be a lot worse."

## Few pleased by 'remnants' of Shop

NORTHBRIDGE --- Residents of the area near The Shop are far from pleased about the newest development in neighborhood dumping, but this isn't something new. They have been plagued by The Shop's trash since last spring. After unanswered calls to the board of health and the run-around from selectmen, they thought no one would help. Then the smell arrived. Along with it came DEQE, White Consolidated and the conservation commission. Someone is finally listening.

"I think it stinks," Tony Campo of 3 West Street said. "I think they're taking advantage of us."

According to Campo, the residents have known about the leaking oil in the area for a couple of months, but they did nothing about it because they thought the town would take care of it.

"We expected them to clean it up. We didn't think they'd put it in our backyard."

The oil soaked dirt was removed from the site and moved to an area at the end of West and Oak streets that was already infested with the Shop's junk. Campo said the plastic covering the material is blowing in the breeze and the smell is going with it.

"Yesterday (Sunday) the smell here was terrible," Frances McGee of 4 West St. said. She said the smell worsened the eyesore of wood, machinery parts and sinks that already inhabited the area.

"It used to be kind of pretty down there when the flowers and trees were in bloom," Ann Rae of 245 Main St. said. "Then all of a sudden piles of junk started coming out of The Shop."

Rae noticed the smell last week when the material was being moved.

"The whole yard smelled like oil. I thought it was one of the cars."

Earlene Bloom of 38 Water Street also

noticed the smell last week. "They brought truckloads of leaking stuff to the end of West and Oak," she said. "The smell is so nauseating. People have been getting headaches and nausea here."

Bloom is especially upset about the possible danger the oily substance may pose. "I have very small children and I wonder if breathing this stuff in for the past week isn't going to effect their lives in the future. I hope they don't find any cancerous material in it. I don't know what it is and I'm frightened."

No one so far has been able to determine the substance so close to people's homes consists of. The people know there is something wrong and they are tired of waiting for help.

"Nobody can find out the truth yet," Bloom said.

—Sue Kushner